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THE REAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RECENT IMMIGRATION

BY W. JETT LAUCK

A LARGE audience was recently gathered in the city of New York to listen to a discussion of the immigration problem by a number of speakers of national reputation. The first address was made by the president of one of our largest northern universities, and the second by a distinguished archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church. Both speakers claimed the American republic was traditionally a place of refuge for the oppressed of all countries, and pointed out how the greatness of our national life had been built upon an absorption of alien peoples. The remarks of each were also concluded with a plea to open wide our doors so that the immigrant representatives of all races and nations of the present day, just as those of past years, might find for themselves and their descendants the opportunities of the new world. At this point a labor leader of local prominence, who had had an extensive association with recent immigrants, turned to a companion who was sitting beside him with the startling question: "I wonder what they would say if two shiploads, one of college presidents and another of archbishops, had landed last week, and the foreign-born college presidents and the archbishops were now trying to get their jobs."

By some persons this remark may be considered as the light utterance of a prejudiced mind. It cannot be received, however, as an expression of the attitude of organized labor toward immigration, for it is one of the peculiar phases of the present immigration situation that the greater number of labor leaders either tacitly or openly stand for a liberal immigration policy. In the light of recent developments the labor leader who asked the question at the New York meet-

ing exhibited a deeper insight into the immigration problem than the majority of his contemporaries.

As a matter of fact, sentiment should play but a small part in deciding our attitude toward immigration of the present day, for the reason that few of the recent arrivals, with the possible exception of some Hebrews, Poles, or Finns from Russia, and Macedonians or Bulgarians from Turkey, are compelled to come to the United States because of political or religious oppression in their native countries. Neither have unbearable economic conditions in the south and east of Europe been the cause of the constantly increasing stream of immigrants from that geographical area. Industrial opportunities in the United States have undoubtedly attracted a large number who have come to this country with the expectation that after a short term of labor and deprivation they would be able to return home to enjoy a much higher economic status. The most significant feature of the situation, however, is that the flow of immigration has been artificially stimulated beyond all normal bounds by the advertising schemes and general policies of steamship companies and private labor agencies. The greater number of immigrants who now come to the United States are not animated by the desire for religious and political freedom in a self-governing republic. Neither are the majority of the recent arrivals looking forward to establishing a home in a new country where advancement is easier than in their native lands. Urged forward by misrepresentations of interested agents or transportation companies, or deluded by the glowing descriptions of friends and relatives who have preceded them, the greater number of our recent immigrants hope by thrift, industriousness, and self-denying economy to be able, after a comparatively short period of labor in the United States, to accumulate an amount sufficient to raise a mortgage, to buy a small piece of land, to engage in business, or to carry to success in their native countries some other cherished plan. After reaching this country, the majority remain permanently, but it is because of conditions over which they have no control, or, on the other hand, because after a period of residence they like this country better than their own. In neither event had they originally intended to stay.

In the discussion of recent years relative to the effects of immigration, too great an emphasis has been placed upon

the social and political aspects of the problem. The recent immigrant from southern and eastern Europe has been more illiterate than the immigrant of former years from Great Britain and northern Europe. He has also been more of a social and political problem because of his uniform inability to speak English. There seems to be little doubt, however, probably because of greater stringency of our present immigration laws, that fewer dependent, defective, and delinquent persons are now admitted as compared with former years. Some startling disclosures, it is true, have been made within the past year as to the bearing of recent immigration upon the social evil and the importation of women for immoral purposes. It has been fairly well established, also, that some of the changes in the character of crime in this country have been due to recent immigration. Increases in the number of cases of homicide and abduction and kidnapping, and other crimes of personal violence, may be largely traced to the heavy immigration from southern and eastern Europe and especially from Italy. To immigrants from Italy, Greece, and Russia may also in considerable measure be ascribed the growth in the number of offenses against public policy, and to the Greek and Russian the violation of local ordinances in large cities. No satisfactory information has yet been secured, however, to show an increase in crime among aliens which is out of proportion with the growth in the adult population. The recent investigation of the Federal Immigration Commission also disclosed the fact that there are relatively more insane and mentally defective persons among the foreign-born than the native-born population, but the report of the same body stated that the provisions of the existing law for the exclusion of mentally unsound persons were complete and comprehensive and satisfactorily administered. Furthermore, a detailed investigation of pauperism by the Federal Commission has also shown that although persons of foreign birth are compelled to receive charity from a greater number of causes and in larger amount than native Americans, yet about equal proportions of both classes of persons are charity-seekers, and the main causes of dependency are the same in the greater number of cases among persons born in this country and those born abroad.

As regards the political condition of the immigrant population, a smaller degree of interest in acquiring citizenship

is manifested by southern and eastern European races than by those of Great Britain and northern Europe, but even in the case of the former races there is a steady increase in citizenship corresponding to period of residence in the United States. An exhaustive investigation of immigrant households in New York and other large cities has also shown considerable congestion and the existence of living conditions of a low order, but, contrary to general opinion, it also developed the fact that a higher degree of congestion prevails in the smaller industrial cities and towns of the country than in the principal cities.

If the social and political conditions, therefore, produced by recent immigration as outlined above constituted the entire immigration problem, the situation would not be one of serious import. As a matter of fact, it is not until the industrial or economic effects of immigration are considered that the real significance of the recent influx of southern and eastern Europeans is made manifest. The greater number of immigrants obviously are attracted to this country by a demand for labor, and the majority come with the expectation of improving their economic condition. During the past forty years an extraordinary expansion in manufacturing and mining has been in progress in this country, as a result of which the number of wage-earners or industrial workers has more than doubled or has increased from two to more than five million persons. This industrial development has been made possible by the availability of the immigrant labor supply and its employment or use in conjunction with improved machinery and industrial processes. As a consequence, there has obviously been a remarkable increase in industrial output and in the permanent wealth of the country. The main point, however, is whether the extensive employment of southern and eastern European industrial workers and the resultant increase in the national wealth has been marked by a corresponding advancement in well-being of our wage-earning classes, or, in other words, whether there has been no falling off in compensation or deterioration of conditions under which the native American has been accustomed to work. When the effect of recent immigration from southern and eastern Europe is measured according to this standard its real import becomes apparent.

The term "American wage-earner" is rapidly becoming

a misnomer. Almost three-fifths of the employees of the principal branches of mining and manufacturing in the United States at the present time are of foreign birth, and about one-fourth are of races from southern and eastern Europe. About one-fifth of the total number of wage-earners were born in this country, but their fathers were born abroad. Less than twenty per cent. of the entire operating forces of our mines and manufacturing establishments are native Americans. In many of our industries the proportion of employees of foreign birth ranges as high as seventy-five per cent., with a corresponding falling off in the number of native Americans. Among bituminous coal and iron ore mine-workers, by way of illustration, less than one-tenth are native Americans. The fact of greatest import in connection with the situation is that about one-half of the industrial workers of foreign birth are southern and eastern Europeans and Asiatics, principally representative of the north and south Italians, Poles, Croatsians, Greeks, Lithuanians, Russians, Portuguese, Slovenians, and Russian and other Hebrews. This transformation in the racial composition of the wage-earners of the country has been brought about by the immigration to the United States during the past thirty years.

The most general effect of this extensive employment of recent immigrants in American industries is found in the character of the industrial communities of the country at the present time. There is no manufacturing city or town or any mining community of any importance in the Middle West, New England, and the Middle States which has not a foreign section made up of industrial workers from southern and eastern Europe. In the older industrial cities and centers of the country, immigrant communities have gradually developed and attached themselves to the original population. On the other hand, a large number of immigrant communities have come into existence within recent years because of the development of some natural resource, such as coal, iron ore, or copper, or by reason of the extension of the principal manufacturing industries of the country. In both classes of industrial communities there has been a distinct segregation of the immigrant and native-American population, and there is little contact or association beyond that rendered necessary by business or working relations. The immigrant workmen and their households usually live

in colonies according to race, attend and support their own churches, maintain their own business institutions and places of recreation, and have their own fraternal and business organizations. As a consequence of this general isolation, the tendencies toward Americanization exhibited by the southern and eastern Europeans are small, and the maintenance of old customs and standards leads to congestion and unsanitary housing and living conditions. Agencies for the Americanization and assimilation of the immigrant wage-earners and their families are rare, and the native Americans, as a rule, are indifferent in their attitude toward the immigrant population and its problems.

The problems which have been created by immigrant communities, however, are mainly political and social. In a consideration of the effect of the influx of southern and eastern Europeans upon native Americans and older immigrant wage-earners of races from Great Britain and northern Europe, the real significance of recent immigration is to be found. In the first place, it is undoubtedly true that the entrance into the operating forces of American mines and industrial establishments of large numbers of southern and eastern European immigrants has exposed the original employees to unsafe and unsanitary working conditions, or led to the imposition of conditions of employment which the Americans and older immigrants have considered unsatisfactory and in many cases intolerable. Unlike the immigrants of past years from Great Britain and northern Europe, the southern and eastern Europeans and Asiatics have had no training or experience to fit them for the occupations which they enter in this country. Consequently they do not know conditions of living or employment which the native American wage-earners consider a necessity, and as a large proportion of the recent arrivals are illiterate and unable to speak English their progress toward American standards has been very slow. The recent immigrant, as a rule, also has very little money when he arrives in search of work, and being in a necessitous condition and without special qualifications, he has no bargaining power and is forced to accept employment under the conditions offered. As a result of the constantly increasing pressure of competition of laborers with these general characteristics, the native American or older immigrant wage-earner has been compelled to acquiesce in the conditions produced by their

employment or to leave the industry entirely. The general effect has been, however, to retard improvements in conditions of employment and to check the advance in wages which might have been expected as a result of industrial expansion had it not been for the available supply of labor from southern and eastern Europe.

The standards of living of the southern and eastern European wage-earners have also been very low. A high percentage of the recent immigrants to our mines and establishments are single, or, what amounts to the same thing, are married men who have left their wives and children in their native countries. They are, therefore, able to adopt a group instead of an independent family method of living and to reduce the outlay for living to a point far below that of the native American. The usual household arrangement among recent immigrants in our industrial communities consists of what is popularly known as the "boarding boss" system. Under this arrangement, a fixed sum, from \$2 to \$3 each month, is paid by each member of a group to the head of the house or the "boarding boss" in return for washing, cooking, and lodging. The cost of the food is either divided in equal shares among the members of the group, or each member buys his own food and has it separately prepared. In many cases, especially among the Bulgarians, Greeks, Ruthenians, and Slovenians, all the rooms of the houses occupied are used for sleeping purposes and as many persons as possible are crowded into one room in order to reduce the per capita rent payment. As a consequence, a higher degree of congestion with all its attendant evils is found in the immigrant households of our industrial communities than in the large cities. Both in our cities and industrial communities, however, the main consideration of the recent immigrant is to live as cheaply as possible, and under the "boarding boss" system, the general monthly living expenditures of the average immigrant industrial worker of recent arrival in the United States do not exceed fifteen dollars, and in the case of the members of a number of races the average cost of living is much lower. As a matter of fact the earnings of the immigrant male heads of families are usually so meager that supplementary funds have to be provided by taking boarders or lodgers into the home, or through contributions of children who are placed at work as soon as possible. Of

more than 22,000 immigrant wage-earners, eighteen years of age or over, who were studied by the Immigration Commission, the average annual earnings were only \$455. The average annual income of immigrant families was also only \$704. In the case of a number of races from the south and east of Europe, the average for all wage-earners as well as for heads of families was less.

Another significant result of the extensive employment of southern and eastern Europeans in mining and manufacturing is seen in the general weakening and, in some instances, in the entire demoralization of the labor organizations which were in existence before the arrival of the races of recent immigration. This condition of affairs has been due to the inability of the labor-unions to absorb within a short time the constantly increasing number of new arrivals. The southern and eastern Europeans, as already pointed out, because of their tractability, their lack of industrial experience and training, and their necessitous condition on applying for work, have been willing to accept, without protest, existing conditions of employment. Their desire to earn as large an amount as possible within a limited time has also rendered the recent immigrant averse to entering into strikes which involved a loss of time and a decrease in earnings. The same kind of thriftiness has led the immigrant wage-earner to refuse to maintain his membership in the labor-unions for any extended period and has consequently prevented the complete unionization of certain occupations in some cases, and, in others, the accumulation of a defense fund by the labor organizations. The high degree of illiteracy among recent immigrants and the inability of the greater number to speak English have also caused their organization into unions by the native Americans and older immigrants to be a matter of large expense. The difficulty of the situation, from the standpoint of the labor organizations, is further increased by the conscious policy of the employers of mixing races in certain departments or divisions of industries and thus decreasing the opportunities for any concerted action because of a diversity of language in the operating forces. In mining operations, by way of illustration, in many sections, no one race is permitted to secure a controlling number in the operating forces of a single mine or mining occupation because of the fear that a common language would enable them to be readily organ-

ized for the purpose of seeking redress for real or fancied grievances.

The impossibility of competing with the recent immigrants or of educating them to demand their own standards of living and conditions of employment has voluntarily or involuntarily led to the displacement in many industries and occupations of native Americans and older immigrants from Great Britain and northern Europe. These displacements have manifested themselves in two ways. In the first place, many of the original employees have entirely withdrawn from the industry or have migrated to other sections of the country where the pressure of the competition of the southern and eastern European was not so strongly felt. The situation in the bituminous coal industry is illustrative of this tendency. Recent immigrants first found employment in large numbers in the mines of western Pennsylvania. The native Americans and older immigrants attempted to control the incoming labor supply, but by the year 1895 were completely inundated. The labor organizations were also disrupted, and finally the early employees practically abandoned the western Pennsylvania field and sought work in other industries in the same section or moved to the coal-producing areas of the Middle West, where the southern and eastern Europeans had not penetrated in considerable numbers. The pressure of competition of the recent immigrants in the mines of the Middle West, however, soon became so strong that the native Americans in large numbers migrated to the mines of Kansas and Oklahoma. Within comparatively recent years, southern and eastern Europeans have in increasing number found employment in the mines of the southwest, and the older employees have again been retreating farther westward to the coal and metaliferous mines of Colorado and other States. On the other hand, there has been in the case of all the principal branches of mining and manufacturing a series of displacements from, or in other words, segregation into, distinct occupations within the industry. This tendency, as contrasted with the abandonment of certain occupations or industries to recent immigrants, has been largely psychological in its nature, and is the result of the feeling uniformly met with in all of our industrial communities that a certain social stigma or lack of respectability attaches to native Americans or older immigrant wage-earners who do the same kind of work as

southern and eastern Europeans. It is the outgrowth of racial prejudice and has always been operative in our industrial establishments. As early as 1840 the Yankee girls who were operatives in the New England cotton-mills abandoned the looms and spindles because of the employment of Irish-women. At a later date the Irish in like manner demurred at the entrance into the mills of French-Canadian girls, and at the present time the French-Canadian female operatives are leaving the cotton factories because of the employment of Polish and other women of recent immigration. In the case of certain industries it is also true that the native Americans have abandoned occupations such as that of pick or hand mining in some of our bituminous mining fields, because of the danger of working by the side of the newcomer from the south and east of Europe. Whether arising from one cause or another, or whether the displacements have resulted in the segregation into certain occupations within or abandonment of the industry by native Americans and older immigrants, they have usually been attended with an economic loss or lower remuneration for the original employees and have directly or indirectly resulted from the impossibility of competing with the incoming immigrant labor supply. Only in the case of a small proportion of native Americans and older immigrant employees has an advancement in the scale of occupations been made possible by the increase in the number of executive and skilled positions due to the expansion within recent years in all branches of mining and manufacturing. The general tendency in our industrial development, however, has been constantly to eliminate the element of skill by the invention of new machinery and processes, and consequently to decrease relatively the number of occupations requiring training and experience.

When the effects of recent immigration, as briefly outlined above, are considered in connection with the fact that the movement to this country has not arisen from political or religious oppression or intolerable economic conditions abroad, it is at once evident that the immigration of the present day is fundamentally an economic or business problem. In analyzing the results of its exhaustive investigations the Immigration Commission formulated for its own guidance the following general principles:

"1. The measure of the rational, healthy development of a country is not the extent of its investment of capital, its output of products, or its

exports and imports, unless there is a corresponding economic opportunity afforded to the citizen dependent upon employment for his material, mental, and moral development.

"2. The development of business may be brought about by means which lower the standard of living of the wage-earners. A slow expansion of industry which would permit the adaptation and assimilation of the incoming labor supply is preferable to a very rapid industrial expansion which results in the immigration of laborers of low standards and efficiency, who imperil the American standard of wages and conditions of employment."

Upon applying these principles to the facts brought to light by their investigations the commission was unanimously led to the opinion that: "further general legislation concerning the admission of aliens should be based primarily upon economic or business considerations touching the prosperity and economic well-being of our people." As a consequence, the commission in its report to Congress recommended that the incoming immigrant labor supply should be checked either by imposing a larger head-tax, by requiring incoming aliens to be in possession of at least twenty-five dollars, or by compelling them to undergo a literacy test. By the adoption of one of these measures it was thought that the number of unskilled laborers annually entering this country could be limited to a point where their absorption into our industrial system would be possible without injury to or the retarding of the natural progress of the native American and the older immigrant wage-earners. To accomplish this end is in reality the immigration problem.

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